

Is Keeping Up Keeping You Down?

Everyday pressures for men

Men are under immense stress to keep up every day. Have you heard the radio advertisements about increasing your sexual performance in the bedroom? Just yesterday driving around I listened to more than 15 - yes 15! Even I felt stressed listening to them.

The pressure to 'perform' doesn't end there. See if any of the following ring true for you. Do you: ¹

- Have difficulty firing-up and getting going, and not just your libido?
- Struggle to find any time to do anything you want to do?
- Feel like you are trapped and cannot change your current situation?
- Have an ongoing sense of tiredness which sleep doesn't seem to cure?
- Feel like you have lost some of your ability to laugh, be spontaneous and relax easily?
- Seem to more easily flare up or get angry for little reason?

Yes to any one of them? So how's that emotional roller coaster working?



Feeling like you have little or no control to manage or change in your life, yet still having high-pressure performance demands brings high levels of stress². Whilst experiencing blue moods is a relatively normal experience in society, if any of the above has been going on for longer than a month or so³, you could be on the radar of the depression continuum, early, progressive or well entrenched.

Men's performance requirements are high, and NOT just in the bedroom.

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Women are not the only ones who wish there were more hours in the day or wish they could just 'take off' for a break alone. And yes, sometimes women act as if they are.

On average men still wear the primary financial pressure of raising a family (even if they're separated!), maintaining a secure job to meet the mortgage, funding to get kids through school, for that well earned break, energy and effort to contribute at home, to be a good father, good dad, and a virile sexual partner. Feeling stressed just reading it?

That's not about any sexual liberation; it's still the reality of society and cultural expectations.

Chronic or ongoing stress increases the risk of experiencing depression.⁴ This is the proverbial Catch 22 and it may feel like a hamster wheel. You know you want to change something, yet how can you, without it all getting worse as you feel you may be letting others or yourself down.

More than at any other time over the past 20 years, men may be struggling to keep UP their manly façade and THAT can be rapidly taking them down.

What does depression look like..?

Depression doesn't always look like a sad, lonely, isolating person. It can be difficult to notice.

Men have learnt well to mask emotions.¹¹ Hiding that your struggling in life, trying to do all the 'right and good' things that are expected of you, working very hard to support your company, your family, to be a great dad and a supportive partner, can have you battling the blues, struggling with anxiety, and possibly sliding into a depressed state.

You may just be working very, very hard to fend it off.



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Men also lose their dreams; they too have significant social constraints that limit their dreams, choices, and influence their sense of responsibility. They lose time with the kids because their work requires travel to maintain financial security, they struggle to find a place in relationship when a new baby comes along, they feel loss and anger about giving up dreams over choosing responsibilities.

Without time for self, time to stimulate, energise and enliven us, time for spontaneous fun, time for real honest intimacy and connection, we all slowly die...from the inside out.

By the time this is seen on the outside, well it's often pretty serious.

This can be more so for men than for women.

Big boys don't cry?

Well not on the outside anyway!

Until quite recently, men were brought up not to talk about their problems, or express their emotions. Emotions have often been associated with femininity, which boys have often been taught to define themselves against.¹² The effect is that men are generally less able than women to express or interpret their emotions. Moreover they may be unwilling to even admit to emotions they associate with weakness, such as fear, sadness, vulnerability or disappointment⁹. Many men live with social expectations to be – or to appear to be – powerful, strong and self-reliant.

This concept can, and has, impacted generations of men with wide reaching personal and social affects and is of great detriment to men's mental health.

The medical diagnosis of depression isn't so different for a male or a female. What is seen as different is the way that genders are able to recognise, work with, and accept their emotions as a very normal part of being human.

Research⁴ indicates that men may more readily 'mask' their feelings, frustrations or losses with the use of distracting or destructive behaviours such as gambling, drinking, even sport, more work, sexing or affairs.

When men do seek treatment, or it does become obvious to them and to others that there is something that needs to be addressed, it may come about as a 'critical' incident in life, or a health, marriage or social crisis

By that time, there may be a co existing disorder to work with such as substance abuse or significant relational issues such as divorce, loss of family or career.

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Hiding from the truth?

In my role as a therapist one of the most consistent underlying factors contributing to depression is that of loss, particularly unresolved or unaddressed grief around losses in life. This seems to be more so with men.

Makes sense really - it's very difficult to allow yourself to grieve if you are not able to emotionally to do so.

When too much of any behaviour distracts you from the reality of your life...that's escapism. Too much escapism compounds issues, there is less time to be present, to relate healthily to self and family, and thus stress increases rather than decreases.

Losses in life then accumulate more rapidly, such as loss of relationships, work performance, self nurture, self-respect, financial status and more.

Distracting or destructive behaviours are unhealthy ways to cope with depression, disconnection, the blues or sadness. Instead they provide an 'emotional greenhouse' for these feelings to thrive.

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